

Washington DC's public school system historically gains students in early childhood and 9th grade

Net enrollment growth among student cohorts progressing from grade to grade also increases at kindergarten for DCPS and at 6th grade for public charter schools.

Public school enrollment in Washington, DC [grew by 33% between 2008 and 2019](#). Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, enrollment declined in SY2020-21 and then increased slightly in SY2021-22. These overall changes are partially explained by fluctuations in the size of student cohorts as they progress from grade to grade. The system is not static; students enter and exit the system, and there are different points where these entries and exits are more common.

This brief takes a historical look at how DC's public school system experienced growth and decline in student cohorts at points after PK3 using the Grade Progression Ratio (GPR) metric for SY2021-22 with the 5-year average GPR for SY2017-18 to SY2021-22 for reference. For most cohorts, the 1-year and 5-year trends are similar. It does not include information from the current school year, SY2022-23.

Understanding Grade Progression Ratios

GPRs are the ratios at which student cohorts progress to the next grade level (i.e., the number of 1st graders divided by the number of kindergarteners the previous year). The counts used to calculate GPRs do not necessarily include the same students from year to year as they are aggregate numbers by grade for each year.

A ratio larger than 1 (or 100%) means that there are more students enrolled in the cohort compared to the previous grade the year before. A ratio less than 100% means that there are fewer students enrolled in a cohort from the previous grade, as a result of students transferring out of the public

school system or, less frequently, students repeating the previous grade or disengaging from school altogether.

Systemwide GPRs reveal cohort growth at PK4 and kindergarten and the start of high school

Systemwide, student cohorts grew in SY21-22 between PK3 and PK4 and from PK4 to kindergarten, as well as from 8th grade to 9th grade. See the black and gray lines above 100% in the graphic.

Aside from these three cohort progressions, the system loses enrollment from cohorts at all other grades as shown by the black and gray lines under 100% in the graphic. The biggest net loss among cohorts occurs from 9th to 10th grade (78%).

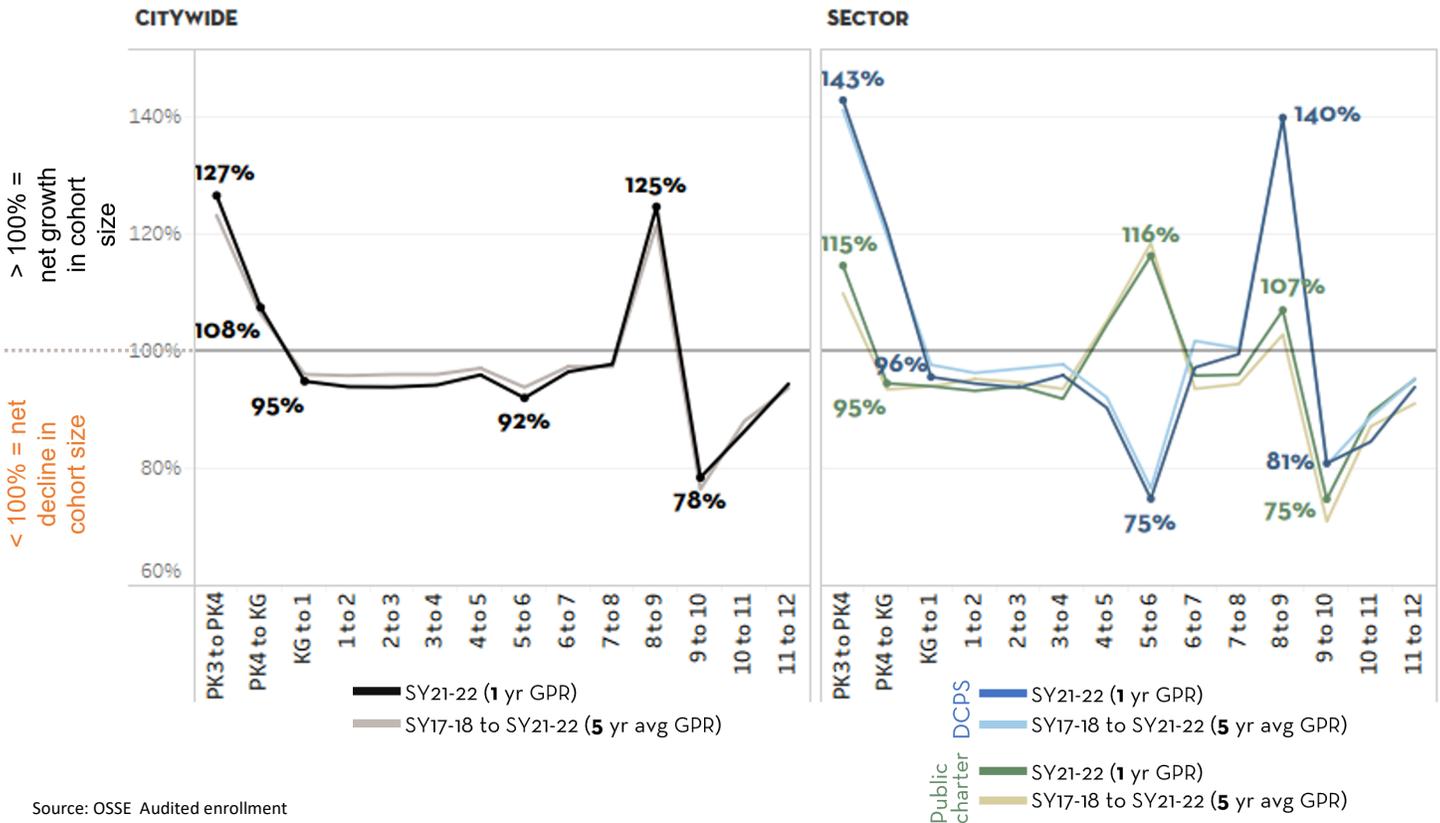
GPRs are similar in elementary grades for both sectors

Thousands of students enter both DCPS and the public charter sector at PK3 and PK4. Because PK3 is the first possible entry point into the public school system, there is no GPR metric. [DCPS PK3 enrollment is smaller relative to public charter schools](#) but the DCPS GPR from PK3 to PK4 is much higher because DCPS has more capacity and higher enrollment at PK4 than PK3, 143% for DCPS compared to 115% for public charter schools (see graphic).

GPRs are also above 100% in DCPS cohorts from PK4 to kindergarten – when schooling becomes compulsory. The graph demonstrates how the GPR pattern shifts a year earlier with public charter schools:

continued

Citywide and Sector Grade Progression Ratios



Source: OSSE Audited enrollment

higher enrollments in PK3, smaller relative cohort growth at PK4 than DCPS, and declining cohorts from PK4 to kindergarten (95%).

Public charter schools have high GPRs from 5th to 6th grade compared to DCPS

Public charter school cohorts grow larger in middle school – 116% from 5th to 6th grade. DCPS cohorts decline substantially from 5th to 6th (75%). The DCPS declines offset the growth in public charter cohorts, resulting in a decline systemwide (92%).

DCPS has high GPRs from 8th to 9th grade compared to public charter schools

Cohorts increase at high school entry, in particular at DCPS where the sector has

much larger 9th grade classes versus 8th grades. The SY21-22 GPR at 9th grade for DCPS was 140%, similar to the 5-year average. The aggregate public charter GPR in SY21-22 was also above 100%.

Both sectors lose large portions of the 9th grade cohort before 10th grade

The systemwide GPR drop from 9th to 10th reflects declines in both sectors, and these are not unique to SY21-22 (see 5-year averages as well as [historical tables in EdScape](#)). The SY21-22 10th grade in public charter sector was 75% of the 9th grade in SY20-21 while the DCPS 10th grade was 81% of the 9th grade in SY20-21.

For more information [visit the GPR page on EdScape](#).

Feedback: Email Edsight.DME@dc.gov